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THIRD PROGRESS REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION IN LIBERIA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted in response to Security Council resolution 866 (1993) of 22 September 1993, by which the Council authorized the establishment of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) for a period of seven months, until 21 April 1994.

2. In accordance with resolution 866 (1993), I submitted reports to the Security Council on the progress of UNOMIL on 13 December 1993 (S/26868) and 14 and 23 February 1994 (S/1994/168 and Add.1). The President of the Security Council issued a statement (S/PRST/1994/9) on 25 February, welcoming the agreement reached by the three Liberian parties to install the Liberian National Transitional Government on 7 March 1994, concomitantly with the start of disarmament, and to hold free and fair elections on 7 September 1994. In my briefing to the Security Council on 9 March, I reported that the Council of State, the executive arm of the Transitional Government, had in fact been installed on 7 March and that disarmament had commenced on the same day.

II. POLITICAL ASPECTS

3. The Liberian parties have now successfully completed a number of important steps in the implementation of the Cotonou agreement (S/26272, annex). The installation of the Council of State of the Transitional Government on 7 March was witnessed by several dignitaries, including President Nicéphore Dieudonné Soglo of Benin, Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Foreign Ministers of Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea and Nigeria, and my Special Representative for Public Affairs.

4. On 11 March the Transitional Legislative Assembly was inducted into office. In accordance with the Cotonou agreement, the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) was given the responsibility for naming the Speaker of the Assembly. The Transitional Legislative Assembly commenced business with the elections of the two deputy speakers from among members who had been nominated by the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) and the National

Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), respectively. The Assembly proceeded to carry out confirmation hearings. The Ministers nominated by IGNU and ULIMO, whose posts were not in dispute, have been sworn in and have taken control of their Ministries.

5. The Supreme Court of Liberia opened for the 1994 March term on 14 March. After his swearing-in, the Associate Justice nominated by ULIMO, as provided in the Cotonou agreement, took his place on the bench.

6. Notwithstanding the positive achievements since the installation of the Council of State, a number of obstacles remain in the search for durable peace in Liberia. The parties have yet to resolve the long outstanding issue of the distribution of the four remaining Cabinet posts (defence, finance, foreign affairs and justice). My Special Representative, Mr. Trevor Gordon-Somers, has urged the parties to demonstrate maximum flexibility in arriving at an acceptable accommodation in this regard. The Cotonou agreement recognizes the prerogative of the parties to allocate the cabinet positions. In this respect, the Council of State has no formal role to play, although, in the absence of a solution, the Liberian people expect leadership and guidance from that executive body. Several options have been discussed among the parties and within the Council of State but no solution has yet been found.

7. In this context, NPFL has been unwilling to permit the seating of its members in the Transitional Legislative Assembly or the swearing-in of those Cabinet nominees whose posts are not in dispute. NPFL also objects to submitting its Cabinet nominees to confirmation hearings on the grounds that such hearings were not stipulated under the Cotonou agreement. The NPFL member on the Council of State has declined to sign the rules of procedure that will govern the functioning of the Council. It is reported that, in the absence of such rules, NPFL has maintained that decisions of the Council are null and void.

8. The question of the allocation of posts to head the public corporations and autonomous agencies has also created an obstacle to the peace process. During discussions at Cotonou in November 1993, NPFL and ULIMO jointly took the position that those posts should be allocated in the same manner as Cabinet ministries and signed a document to reflect their joint agreement. IGNU maintained the view that this interpretation was contrary to the provisions of the Cotonou agreement and therefore did not sign the document. Discussions among the signatories to the Cotonou agreement on a suitable and equitable distribution of those posts have yet to yield positive results.

9. Immediately prior to the installation of the Council of State, a dispute arose in the leadership of ULIMO. A rift between the Chairman and the Field Commander resulted in an outbreak of fighting among the ULIMO forces, along ethnic lines, between the Krahn and Mandingo factions. Reconciliation efforts by the elders of both ethnic groups and several other interested people, including the ECOWAS Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) Field Commander and the United Nations Chief Military Observer, have been helpful. My Special Representative reports that Chairman Valentine Strasser, the Head of State of Sierra Leone, has succeeded in reconciling the ULIMO leaders, and the Government of Sierra Leone has issued a communiqué to that effect.

10. UNOMIL disseminates a weekly brief of its activities to the local population and this has become an important source of information on the peace process. It provides a credible basis for public understanding of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, repatriation and, eventually, elections. Such proactive public information strategies have contributed to confidence-building among Liberians.

11. My Special Representative has reported to me that the Liberian signatories to the Cotonou agreement continue to search for solutions to the many problems that have emerged since the installation of the Council of State. In his discussions with the Council and the leaders of the parties, he stresses the need for maximum flexibility in their dealings with each other. In response to pronouncements of the Council regarding the dissolution of the parties, the Special Representative believes it would be desirable that the parties continue to exist until the completion of disarmament, in order to provide a much needed liaison function. However, the leaders of the parties should avoid any interference in the functioning of the Council. For its part, the Council will need to demonstrate to the Liberian people a commitment to national rather than parochial interests, going beyond the concerns of narrow constituencies during this short transition period leading to elections.

III. ELECTORAL PROCESS

12. In his acceptance speech on 7 March 1994, the Chairman of the Council of State, Mr. David Kpomakpor, confirmed that the holding of free and fair elections on 7 September 1994 was a foremost concern of the Liberian National Transitional Government. In view of the relatively short time period remaining before the elections, the Elections Commission has intensified its organizational work in order to develop and finalize a detailed calendar of activities leading up to elections. The Commission recently developed and adopted a set of rules and regulations governing its internal operations.

13. The Elections Commission has finalized and submitted a draft electoral budget to the Council of State for its consideration. On the basis of a draft budget prepared by a joint mission of the United Nations and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in September 1993, the Elections Commission has estimated that an overall amount of US$ 13.7 million will be required to carry out the electoral process. It is reported that the Transitional Government will endeavour to provide some $8.5 million of this amount and will seek international support for the remaining $5.2 million.

14. Implementation of technical assistance for the electoral process from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is well under way. This assistance focuses on reinforcing the institutional structure of the Elections Commission and strengthening its technical capacity to organize and administer free and fair elections. UNDP has provided the Commission with minimum office requirements to commence its operations and an internationally recruited, full-time electoral expert. A number of issues in the electoral process must be addressed, including voter education, the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons and the mobilization of resources required for the elections. A chief

technical adviser is due to arrive in May and will take up these and other urgent issues.

15. While the Elections Commission is now focusing on technical preparations for elections, there are a number of other issues that need to be addressed under the very short time-frame until 7 September. If elections, in accordance with the Liberian Constitution, are to be based on single-member constituencies and registration of voters is to take place, then it will be necessary for the refugees and displaced persons to have returned to their constituencies of residence before the end of the registration period, which should be well before the election date in order to ensure their participation in the electoral process.

16. Several technical missions to Liberia in the recent past have indicated that, if elections are to be fairly organized on the basis of the existing electoral system in Liberia, namely, single-member constituencies, it will not be possible to organize them before the agreed time-limit of 7 September; it would take a year, or even more. They have suggested that if elections have to be held before 7 September, they can only be held on the basis of proportional representation in a national constituency.

IV. MILITARY ASPECTS

17. UNOMIL, having attained its total authorized strength of 368 military observers in early January 1994, has proceeded with the deployment of United Nations military observers throughout the country. In accordance with its concept of operations, UNOMIL has so far deployed military observers in 27 team sites out of a total of 39 projected sites (see map). Four regional headquarters have been established and are operational at Monrovia (central region), Tubmanburg (western region), Gbarnga (northern region) and Tapeta (eastern region). The eastern regional headquarters had originally been designated for the town of Zwedru. However, owing to the absence of any logistic support and to insecurity in the area, the headquarters has, instead, been established at Tapeta. The military observers are engaged in the patrolling of border crossings and other entry points, observation and verification of disarmament and demobilization and the investigation of cease-fire violations.

18. In recent weeks, ECOMOG has deployed into the western (Tubmanburg) and northern (Gbarnga) regions. Deployment of both UNOMIL and ECOMOG in Upper Lofa has been impeded by insecurity in the area. Likewise, deployment in the south-east has been curtailed by the activities of the Liberian Peace Council (LPC). UNOMIL and ECOMOG are currently engaged in consultations with ULIMO and with the NPFL and LPC in order to reach agreement on further deployment in the western and south-eastern regions.

19. LPC, which emerged in the south-eastern part of Liberia after the Cotonou agreement was signed in July 1993, has engaged in skirmishes with NPFL for the past five months. Recently, LPC has aimed its activities north, at the town of Zwedru. UNOMIL and ECOMOG are consulting with LPC and NPFL on their deployment into the area, and on the disarmament of combatants, with a view to creating a

buffer zone between NPFL and LPC areas. LPC combatants are included in the overall plan for disarmament and demobilization in this area.

20. During the last weeks of March, the security situation in the south-western part of the country deteriorated because of the internal conflict within the ULIMO leadership along ethnic lines. The conflict escalated when ULIMO Krahn and Mandingo groups clashed in the town of Tubmanburg. Since public reconciliation of the ULIMO leadership was announced on 1 April, the situation in the south-western region appears to have stabilized.

21. Once UNOMIL and ECOMOG are fully deployed in the eastern and western regions, in accordance with the Cotonou agreement, buffer zones will be established within Liberia on the borders with Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone. The Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone have written to me seeking the assistance of the international community in providing resources, such as vehicles and communications equipment, to enable them to create buffer zones within their borders with Liberia. In my view this would greatly facilitate the effectiveness of surveillance in the buffer zones and improve security in those areas. Member States may wish to provide such assistance to those Governments on a bilateral basis.

22. Following the deployment of UNOMIL and ECOMOG, the Joint Cease-fire Monitoring Committee (JCMC) has been replaced by a Violations Committee, chaired by the United Nations Chief Military Observer, in accordance with the Cotonou agreement. The Violations Committee is the forum through which UNOMIL and ECOMOG address issues of cease-fire violations with the parties. To date, four violation reports have been received by the Committee, three of which have been investigated and settled.

23. At the time of its dissolution, JCMC had received a total of 101 reports of cease-fire violations. It had investigated and resolved 79 of those reports; 10 others were investigated but have not yet been resolved. The 22 remaining cases were not investigated, owing to lack of information or inability to move freely in order to carry out the investigations.

24. Three demobilization centres, one for each of the warring factions, were opened on 7 March. It is reported that the total number of combatants of all parties is approximately 60,000 soldiers. In the first month of disarmament, more than 2,200 combatants, from all parties, were disarmed and demobilized. Owing to political difficulties, however, disarmament has been slower than it technically could have been. Intensive consultations sponsored by my Special Representative, the United Nations Chief Military Observer and the Field Commander of ECOMOG, have taken place with the parties, with a view to keeping the process on course. Assuming the full cooperation of the parties, it is estimated that disarmament could be completed in two months.

25. Combatants are brought to assembly areas and encampment sites under the command and control of their respective parties. The parties remain responsible for them during their processing at encampment sites. Although ECOMOG is charged with disarming the fighters, monitored by UNOMIL, disarmament is greatly facilitated by the presence of liaison officers of each party at the encampment sites.

26. The demobilization process includes the gathering of information on each ex-combatant in regard to his background and future plans, issuance of an identification card, a medical examination, counselling and sensitization, after which a reintegration package (second-hand clothes, rice, simple agricultural tools) is given to each ex-combatant. Finally, each individual is transported to the community of his choice.

27. Flexible arrangements have been put in place to accommodate specific target groups, including detainees. To date, 642 NPFL detainees have been processed and released from detention in Monrovia. The child ex-fighters create a special problem and are taken to demobilization sites coordinated by the Children Assistance Programme, a national non-governmental organization. By the end of March, 136 children had been transported to 3 different sites. Fifteen of those children have since been reunited with their families while the remainder will continue with counselling prior to going home. It is expected that a total of 6,000 child fighters will be disarmed through this process.

28. Sensitization of communities throughout the country is an important prerequisite for national reconciliation. Prior to the opening of demobilization centres, sensitization workshops were held for military and civilian personnel of the NPFL and the Armed Forces of Liberia. A similar workshop was planned for ULIMO but this was postponed because of internal strife within that party.

29. The paucity of resources and logistical problems are major challenges in demobilization, which are exacerbated by exaggerated expectations communicated by the leadership of the factions to the ex-combatants. Feeding demobilizing combatants in assembly areas in advance of disarmament has increased the costs of the operation.

30. Furthermore, the mandate of UNOMIG does not include the medium-term and long-term requirements of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Accordingly, UNDP and the United Nations system, the African Development Bank, the Bretton Woods institutions and Governments supportive of the reconstruction of Liberia are urged to work closely with the Liberian National Transitional Government in addressing the priority needs for the transition and beyond.

V. HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

31. At present, 1,400,000 needy civilians are receiving humanitarian assistance in Liberia, while another 300,000 are inaccessible because of security problems. Since my last report, 1,185 tons of humanitarian assistance have been delivered to ULIMO areas, except in Upper Lofa, and 3,000 tons have been delivered in NPFL areas using the Côte d'Ivoire route and the Monrovia-to-Gbarnga highway.

32. Since February 1994, approximately 40,000 civilians have been displaced from the south-east region and Grand Bassa county, as a result of LPC attacks against NPFL, while 10,000 have fled from Lower Lofa to Bong county claiming severe harassment by the Lofa Defence Force (LDF). United Nations agencies joined efforts with non-governmental organizations in bringing relief to the displaced.

33. Skirmishes between Krahn and Mandingo elements of ULIMO impeded the distribution of assistance in Cape Mount and Bomi counties. In addition, some 150,000 displaced persons and refugees in Upper Lofa remained cut off from any relief assistance. Those constraints on access should be overcome with the deployment of ECOMOG and UNOMIL to the areas in question. However, the movement of humanitarian assistance to the needy population in those areas remains problematic because of recent ULIMO activities.

34. Logistical problems also inhibit the delivery of relief supplies, compounded by the deteriorating roads during the rainy season. Many bridges are in urgent need of repair if they are to withstand heavy traffic. An airlift of food aid to Upper Lofa is once more under consideration. Implementing agencies, both international and local non-governmental organizations, that distribute food are often hampered by limited transport capacity.

35. Two inter-agency assessment missions were carried out in accessible areas of the south-east and in Cape Mount and Bomi counties. Nutritional status was found to be within normal limits in the areas visited where security was satisfactory and there had been a reasonable harvest.

36. A non-governmental organization survey carried out in Upper Margibi, an area where in December 1993 a malnutrition rate of 40 per cent had been reported, showed a dramatic improvement, with a rate of 4 per cent. However, in the absence of household food security and with the cultivation period due, a general rice distribution accompanied with seeds and tools was recommended.

37. In many parts of the country, distribution of seeds and tools could contribute significantly to building food security. Three thousand tons of seeds for distribution are already in stock, representing 50 per cent of the country's requirements. In addition, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has recently received a substantial donation for the acquisition of seeds and agricultural tools. The potential coverage is, however, limited by security and logistical factors.

38. The Minister of Planning recently convened a meeting of donors and United Nations and non-governmental organizations, to establish a coordinating forum for relief, resettlement and rehabilitation activities throughout Liberia. The Government is beginning to assume responsibility in those areas since the country has been unified.

39. Some 700,000 Liberian refugees are registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in five neighbouring West African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone). The majority of them have expressed their intention to return as soon as security and peace are restored throughout the country. Since the signing of the Cotonou agreement, approximately 60,000 refugees have returned, including 30,000 assisted by UNHCR. It is expected that an additional 150,000 will return before organized repatriation begins. UNHCR has an ongoing programme of assistance for spontaneous returnees in three counties, which will be extended to other counties as the security situation improves.

40. It is estimated that 414,000 refugees will opt to repatriate with the assistance of UNHCR, the majority returning directly to their arear of origin or of their choice. A package of assistance consisting of food, household goods, seeds and agricultural and shelter construction tools will be given to each family.

41. A large number of refugees are engaged in agricultural activities and have already enrolled their children in schools in the countries of asylum for the 1994 academic year. For those reasons, many refugees may choose to begin repatriation in the latter part of 1994. Sample surveys among refugees indicate that a number of them may wish to return only after the general elections and installation of an elected Government.

42. Preparatory work for the return and reintegration of the returnees has commenced with the identification and rehabilitation of reception centres and an estimation of the need for basic services, such as water and health-care facilities. Some roads and bridges to the reception centres and to drop-off points will also require repairs. Resource availability constitutes the main constraint for preparatory work to start.

VI. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

43. The General Assembly, by its resolution 48/247 of 5 April 1994, authorized the Secretary-General to enter into commitments for the maintenance of UNOMIL, at a monthly rate not to exceed $4,359,100 gross ($4,232,900 net), for a period of three months beyond 21 April 1994, should the Security Council decide to continue the Observer Mission beyond that date. Therefore, should the Council decide to extend the UNOMIL mandate as recommended in paragraph 51 below, I intend to seek the additional resources required for the maintenance of the Mission from the General Assembly at its current session.

44. As at 31 March 1994, of the $39.8 million assessed on Member States, unpaid assessments to the UNOMIL Special Account amounted to $26.4 million.

45. With regard to the Trust Fund for the Implementation of the Cotonou Accord on Liberia, as at 31 March 1994, voluntary contributions received amounted to $15.16 million from the Governments of Denmark, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, of which expenditure totalling $11.7 million at the time of the present report has been authorized.

VII. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

46. The four years of civil conflict in Liberia have been marked by deplorable atrocities against civilians. With every outbreak of fighting, innocent civilians are displaced, harassed and killed. Flows of humanitarian assistance are interrupted. In accordance with Security Council resolution 866 (1993), by which the Council requested UNOMIL to report to me any major violations of humanitarian law, my Special Representative has been in close contact with national and international institutions in order to monitor such violations. I

call on all parties to extend their full cooperation to the international community in order to ensure the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout the country.

47. For the reasons described in paragraph 16 of the present report, and given the importance of holding free and fair elections within the agreed time-frame, I urge the Liberian authorities to give favourable consideration to organizing these transitional elections on the basis of a single national constituency with proportional representation. I am ready to send immediately to Liberia a team of international experts to consult with the Liberian National Transitional Government and the Elections Commission on how this could be done.

48. In my past reports on UNOMIL, I have appealed to Member States to contribute to the Trust Fund for Liberia. I wish to thank those Member States which have so generously contributed. However, support for ECOMOG, for the demobilization and reintegration and for the holding of elections remains urgently needed. With specific regard to the election process, my Special Representative has reported that, without external financial support, the Liberian National Transitional Government will not be able to meet the resource requirements of holding the elections. I therefore renew my call to Member States to continue their support to the peace process in Liberia, especially at this critical juncture, by contributing to the Trust Fund.

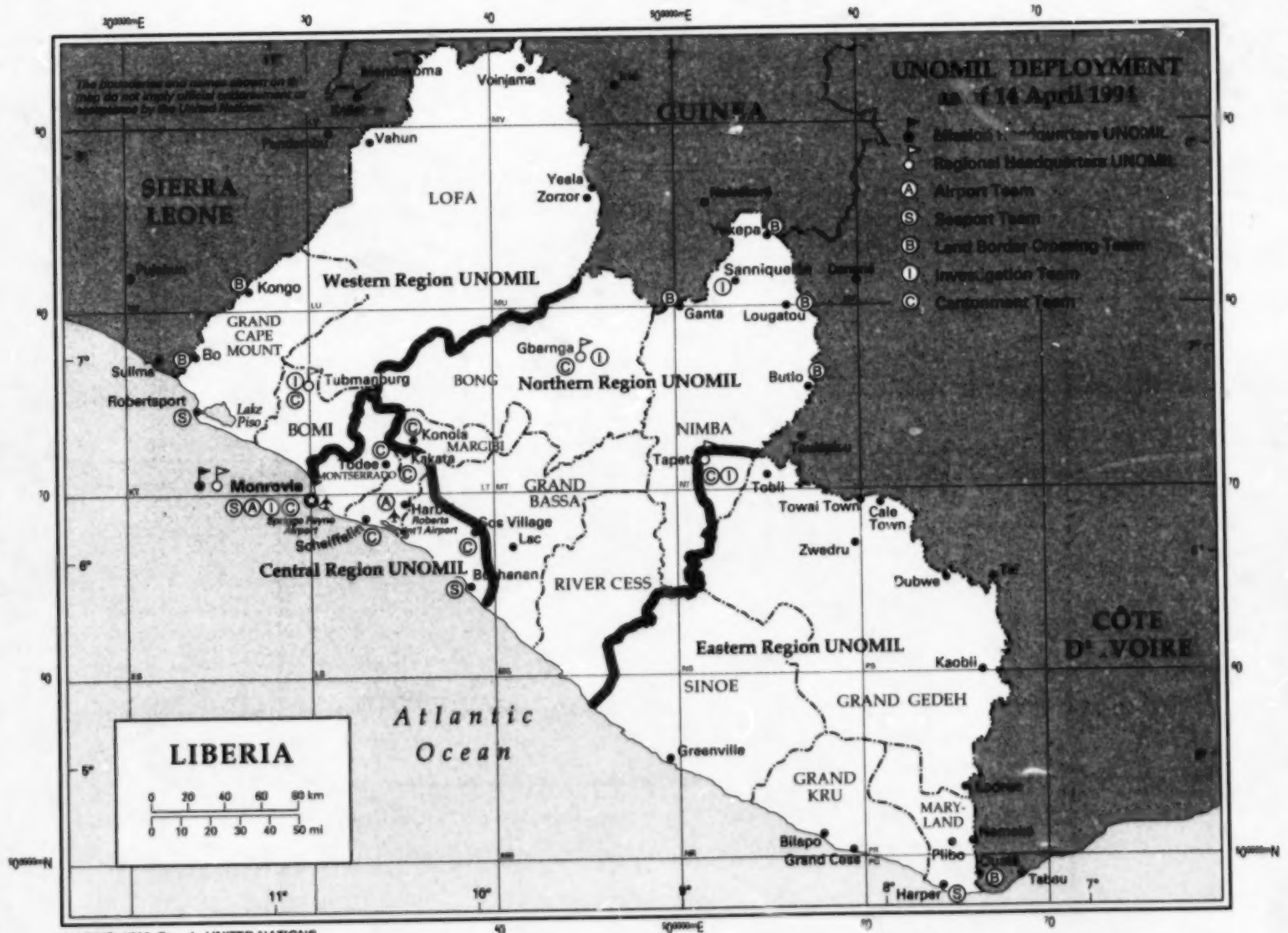
49. I am pleased to report that collaboration between UNOMIL and ECOMOG is of the highest professional order. With the advance deployment of United Nations military observers, ECOMOG has been able to benefit from information on the terrain and physical facilities in different locations, as well as from the building of confidence that the military observers were able to generate throughout the country.

50. The Liberian parties have achieved progress in their search for peace with the installation of the Council of State and the start of disarmament on 7 March, and the agreement to hold free and fair elections on 7 September 1994. However, the disposition of the four remaining Cabinet posts, which has still to be determined, constitutes a major impediment to the full installation of the Transitional Government. Continued military conflict involving various parties also impedes the implementation of the Cotonou agreement. I urge the Liberian parties to make a concerted effort and to cooperate with one another in order to overcome the remaining impediments to the full installation of the Transitional Government. I also call on them to respect the terms of the Cotonou agreement in ensuring that their combatants lay down their arms.

51. Taking into account the progress made thus far in the implementation of the Cotonou agreement, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNOMIL for a further period of six months, which will include the elections scheduled for September 1994. Provision must also be made for the liquidation phase of the Mission, which would end by 31 December. However, if the question of the disposition of the four remaining ministries is not resolved within two weeks and if there is no further progress in the peace process within this period, I will request the Council to review the mandate of UNOMIL. In this connection, the parties should be aware that while the international community has been generous in its support of the implementation of the Cotonou agreement,

this support cannot continue indefinitely if the necessary cooperation is not forthcoming from the parties.

52. I shall continue to keep the Council fully informed of the situation in Liberia and of progress being made in the implementation of the Cotonou agreement. I shall recommend that the Council review the situation in Liberia at any stage should developments warrant such a review.



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